

Get Serious. About Small Groups. – Acts 2:42

If you've just joined us, we're continuing our Get Serious series and theme for the year from 1 Tim 4:7-8 where Paul says to *train yourself for godliness*

This morning, it's Get Serious About Small Groups

Hope to accomplish several things . . .

Want to give you a biblical overview on the ins and outs of SG's

Make sure you understand that SG's are not a modern day fad of the church

They've been neglected in times past, yes

But they've also been a part of discipleship for thousands of years among God's

people, starting way back in Moses' day with the clans/family units of the Israelites

But most importantly, I want you to plug into a SG

We're going to look at a bunch of Scriptures with that purpose in mind, starting with *the* foundational text in **Acts 2:42** (read it)

They devoted themselves to *the apostles' teaching* (the Word of God) – got that
And *the prayers* – most likely a reference to worship, both individually and corporately at designated times during the day and the week; that's a no-brainer
And *the breaking of bread* – i.e. remembering Christ's death on our behalf around the Lord's Table (obviously important)
And to *fellowship*

Of all the things that characterized the first believers, what was so significant about their devotion to fellowship that caused Luke to include it in this awesome four-some?
Why not fasting, or witnessing, giving, service, baptism, kindness?
Why fellowship?

- The key to answering that question is understanding what fellowship is, and what it isn't
It's not socializing; It's not small talk in the lobby
It's not potlucks in the church basement
It's not even Bible study – church world is filled with Bible studies of one sort or another, that are completely void of fellowship
Those things could *include* fellowship; Or be the *result* of fellowship
But they are not fellowship in and of themselves

Fellowship comes from the Greek word, *koinonia*, and it means . . .

Fellowship – belonging together in mutual partnership

It means striving *together*, for the same things, at the same time, in the same way

It means setting aside your personal preferences for the sake of the whole

It means sharing all that you have, including your life, with those in the body of Christ

Paul said in **1 Thess 2:8** – *being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.*

It means cultivating a relationship that leads to partnership in the things of God

- When you get your mind around that/fellowship, you begin to understand why the early church devoted themselves to it
Without it, all they had was a dry, stale classroom of information
But *with* it, they had a community of passion and pursuit
Without it, all they had was a collection of dabblers
But *with* it, they had community of disciples

And one of the best ways to cultivate such a community and devote ourselves to fellowship, is to meet together in SG's – there's no better way

Can't belong together in biblical sense, if you don't meet together in a practical sense

Small Groups – regular gatherings of 6-16 people for the purpose of fellowship, godliness, and spiritual growth.

Which is why we need to get serious about SG's

Serious enough to make changes in your schedule and go

Serious enough to join one and stick with it

For about 40% of you who are already in a SG, I trust this will add fuel to your fire

For the other 60% who aren't, I hope it *lights* yours, and convinces you to plug in

To encourage you and urge you to do exactly that, I want to give you . . .

10 Reasons to Get Serious About Small Groups

10 Reasons that I hope will address your questions and concerns, overcome your hesitations, and convince you of the need for such a thing in your life

Starting with the fact that . . .

1. They're conducive to fellowship (Acts 2:42)

When you meet consistently and regularly with a small group of people with the express purpose of training yourself for *godliness* . . .

Chances are very good that God will knit your hearts together in mutual partnership

But it's not an automatic – just because you meet together, doesn't mean there's F

Doesn't mean you belong together; Or that there's mutual partnership

The key is that everyone comes together for the same purposes

Hungry for God and his Word – my prayer recently

When that's the case, fellowship happens; You can't stop it

It's the same thing that happens among people in a community when catastrophe hits

They partner together and strive for the same things in the midst of adversity, and it draws them together

That's not too unlike the Christian life

There's plenty of adversity around; And plenty of risks to take for Christ

And plenty of glory to be given to God

And it all happens best when we we're in fellowship with one another

And F happens most in the context of SG's

2. God IS one (John 10:30; 15:26)

Jn 10:30 – *I and the Father are one*

In **Jn 15:26** we get a glimpse of the interconnectedness of the Godhead (Jesus speaking) –
When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

HS, sent by Jesus, from the Father, makes Christ known – see how interwoven they are

Put that together with Deut 6:4 where Moses says – *The Lord our God, the Lord is one* . . .

That's trinity talk – where God is portrayed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

3 persons, yet one essence; one God

While that triune nature of the Godhead is never explicitly defined in Scripture, it's constantly implied and described

There's one God who has chosen to manifest himself in 3 persons, in perfect unity
Which means that the very essence of God *IS* a SG – a SG of perfect, unbroken F
If it's good enough for God, as part of his very nature . . .
I'd say it's good enough for us as we strive for *godli-ness*

In fact, you were created for it

3. You were created for community (Gen 1:27)

Gen 1:27 – *God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him*

We were created in the image of God

Which means that just like God exists in perfect fellowship/community . . .

We too were wired/*created* for community

That's one of the reasons he designed marriage – so that man would not be alone, but in constant community

It's one of the reasons he offers us salvation – so that we can be in constant community with him

It's one of the reasons he ordained the church, of which SG's are a part – so that we could be in constant community with one another

Community/fellowship is part of your emotional DNA – you can't get away from it

You can suppress it, just like a dysfunctional hermit, but you can't make it go away

The longing *will* linger, no matter how much you pursue self-reliance

And the further from community you get, the more miserable you'll be – even if you're an introvert

Because everybody needs fellowship – you were created for it

4. Jesus was (Mark 3:13-14; 9:2)

Mk 3:13-14 – *And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach . . .*

Jesus was barraged by people, and followed by thousands

But he chose to spend the vast majority of his time and effort discipling a SG of 12

And not just 12, but 3

Mk 9:2 – *After 6 days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.*

Within his SG of 12, he sometimes focused on a SG of 3

Jesus was serious about discipling people in the context of SG's – so should we

5. The first Christians were (Acts 2:44-46; 12:12; 20:18-20)

The first believers were serious about getting together in SG's

It was one of the main ways they devoted themselves to fellowship

Read Acts 2:44-47a – they were about large corporate gatherings on a consistent basis

And about small home gatherings on a consistent basis

Just to show you that practice wasn't a flash in the pan, flip over to Acts 12

Peter had just been miraculously released from prison by an angel, and Luke records

what followed in v12 (read 12:12) – they were gathered together in a home, praying

Acts 20:18-20 – Years have passed; Paul speaking to elders in church at Ephesus saying . . .

Evidently, it was common for the early Christians to not only gather publicly (in large numbers), but also in homes (in small numbers)

The first Christians were serious about SG's

6. A Christian individualist is a contradiction of terms (Romans 12:4-5)

Romans 12:4-5 – *For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*

By virtue of our *individual* salvation, we are part of the *family* of God, the body of Christ
Members one of another

We belong together in theory; Question is – are we going to live it out in life?

There's no such thing as a Christian individualist; Christian lone-ranger

To remain separate, fragmented, and solitary is unnatural

If you think you're an island unto yourself – that you don't need anyone else

That you can handle life all by yourself

That your life is just between you & God; That relationships are for sissies . . .

You've got it wrong – I used to think that way and I was wrong

Our culture breeds that kind of rugged individualism – but that's not God's way

God designed us as members of a body; parts of a whole

Which is why we *need* the unity and togetherness found in SG's

The alternative is a lonely, unfulfilled life, that's all about you – and as a Christian, that's a contradiction

7. It's a place of sharpening (Proverbs 27:17)

Prov 27:17 – *Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.*

It's a comparison that just like iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another

Just like a file on the edge of a mower blade sharpens it and conforms it to a shape that is most effective for cutting grass

So too, our personality and character is sharpened, and refined, and conformed to Christ, through the constructive feedback of a friend

My blade is a little dull and sloppy right now, because I haven't sharpened for awhile

Some of you are like that, aren't you – you haven't been sharpened by another brother or sister in Christ, and you're a bit sloppy in your walk with Christ

We need sharpening/refining – all of us

We all need our edges to be softened; We all need to grow in our weaknesses

We all need people to address the issues we don't see, or refuse to admit

That's accountability – a necessary part of every SG

And a necessary part of growth for every believer

But if you never allow your life to be touched by the sharpening of another person's *scrutiny* – you won't grow

Just like this blade will never get sharp just by sitting next to the file

A life, just like a knife, that doesn't get sharpened on a regular basis, gets dull/ineffective

8. It's where care happens best (Eph 4:11-12)

1 Cor 12:24-26 – *God has so composed the body . . . that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*

God has so designed the body of Christ, the church – to ensure that there is adequate care among us
But that care won't happen, can't happen, if we're not involved in one another's lives . .
If we're not meeting *regularly*, in small enough groups, to know what's going on
How can you share and care in the things of life if you don't know about them? You can't

You can't fulfill the "One Another's" of the Bible, like . . .
Bear one another's burdens; Spur one another on
Confess your sins to one another; Pray for one another . . .
If you're never around one another
That's the mutual exchange of ministry/care that God intends for us in community
And apart from SG's, it's exceedingly difficult, if not impossible

Just like it's impossible for me to tangibly care for every one of you
I wish I could; There's simply no way; Nor can our staff do it all
More importantly, that's not how God designed it
Eph 4:11-12 – *He [Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the building up of the body of Christ . . .*

It's my responsibility to equip *you* to care for one another and build one another up
Not for me to do it all; Not for me to be the hub of a great big wheel . . .
But for our church to be a spider web of mutual care and support for one another
Not for me to be the first one in your basement when it floods
Or at your bedside when your sick; Or on the phone when you need counsel
That's what SG's are for – they're the first line of defense
If you pass up SG's, you pass up care – it's as simple as that

9. Regular encouragement is a must (Heb 3:12-13)

Heb 3:12-13 – *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

We need to get serious about SG's because encouragement is a must in our walk with Christ – it's a must if we're going to persevere in our faith
This isn't the feel good kind of encouragement – "Come on Johnny, you can do it"
No, no – this is the "you-gotta-do-this-you're-life-depends-on-it!" kind of encouragement't

That none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin
You can't handle the lust of the flesh on your own
Or the subtleties of pride; Or the deceitfulness of sin that whispers– it's ok; no big deal
You can't handle that on your own
You need, I need, we all need to be *exhorted* (i.e. urged, pressed, pushed, encouraged), *all* the time

10. They're a great testimony (John 17:20-21)

In **John 17:20-21** Jesus is praying on his way to the Garden of Gethsemane and says –
I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

One of the last things Jesus prays for in his life here on earth, is our *oneness* – the *same* oneness he has with the Father
That's unbelievable – he actually thinks we're capable of that kind of unity, and prays for it

But oneness doesn't happen just because you sit in the vicinity of same people each week
You have to get *together* with them – regularly
For Bible study, prayer, and accountability – that's what happens in every single one of our SG's, every single week
And when you do, you'll be a testimony to those around you – not only in your group, but in our neighborhood, family, and workplace
A testimony that Jesus, the Son of God, is *worth* getting serious about

So for all those reasons, add a 5th step to your plan for godliness, and **join** a SG
My Plan for Godliness

- 1. Get serious about it** (godliness)
- 2. Commit to a plan** (discipleship)
- 3. Establish a consistent time and place to meet with the Lord**
- 4. Get serious about Worship**
- 5. Join a Small Group**